LONDON TRAFFIC KNOWS ITS PLACE

Scotland Yard Aide Tells How Safety Is Realized by Responsibility.

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By CORA WELLS THORPE.

Scotland Yard had given me the long anticipated appointment, and in strict compliance with the hour set for a rendezvous promising to be the most intriguingly interesting of the summer's conferences, I arrived punctually at 11 o'clock on the dignified threshhold of England's police hierarchy.

Whether I subconsciously expected to see Mr. Sherlock Holmes and pipe in the flesh, or Dr. Watson emerging from some unsuspected corridor, I do not now recall, but I was conscious of making a somewhat hurried mental readjustment as a deep British voice addressed me.

"I believe, ma'am, your appointment is with our commissioner of police, Mr. Alker Tripp," and on my confirmation, the burly, uniformed Briton in whose cheerful, open countenance I could detect no suspicion of mystery, led me with no further ceremony down the impressive hall to the nearby lift. Also, be it confessed, if in the glass cases which flanked this corridor, I had hoped to catch glimpses of exhibits of the tools and the stock and trade of England's underworld, my expectations were doomed to disappointment. These shining cabinets contained only a resplendent array of silver urns, which, I comforted myself, no doubt were commemorative of some of the coups with which we are wont to credit Great Britain's secret service.

Fails to Look the Part.

Nor did the gracious and highly cultured gentleman, into whose presence I was promptly ushered, convey to any greater degree the sleuth-like qualities with which our infancy's imagination has colored this formidable police force.

"Of course, I am here, Mr. Tripp, to learn what Great Britain has to teach the United States about traffic control," I volunteered.

Previous experience on the continent had suggested this as a usually successful approach to traffic officialdom, and it proved its value again as an expeditious means of breaking the ice.

"Well," the commissioner laughingly replied, as he waved his hand invitingly toward a comfortable leather chair, "I suppose that is as good a way as any other to play on a Briton's ego."

But I had really meant it, and I so assured him, for had I not just arrived from a fortnight's motoring in Shropshire, where the English lanes, in some cases survivals of the original Roman chariot roads—and no wider—proceeded in a close succession of hairpin curves, flanked by rock walls, which in turn were overgrown with some 12 to 15 feet of buckthorn hedge? Had my host and I not sped through miles of such lanes, our small Austin nosing its way at no mean speed up hill and down dale, until we had risen finally to the gorse and bracken covered uplands which commanded an unbroken view of the gorgeous, rough Welsh country beyond? How we had escaped with our lives, as night after night we journeyed from one end of Salop to the other, was and will remain a profound mystery only to be explained by sheer luck, and I said as much.

Safe Because of Danger.

"But," responded Mr. Tripp, "English lanes are safe because they are so dangerous. With their unending curves, doubling back almost upon themselves, their narrowness and hedges, drivers can't make time, and those that wish to do so keep on the highways. All we have to do to increase our accident toll is to convert our old English lanes into thoroughfares. At present their obvious danger makes drivers careful. I believe you find the same thing true in America, say, for instance, on your Baltimore pike."

This was turning the tables! Indeed, the conversation was taking on an unexpected profundity of knowledge, quite in keeping with the best traditions of Scotland Yard.

In response to my obvious surprise, Mr. Tripp continued, "I made a traffic study of your highway systems in the United States before I published my recent book, 'Road Traffic and Its Control.'"

The latter volume, the most authoritative one published on European traffic, had recently made its appearance, and as the press notices, which I had fortunately read, observed, was founded on the author's 40 years' experience as a cyclist, 30 years as a motorist and a very respectable yearly mileage on foot. Besides he was responsible among other features of town planning for the scheme of control which was devised on the coronation of King George VI.

Quizzes Him on D. C. Lights.

An inspiration came to me on the heels of his last remark. Why not secure the reaction of an English authority not alone to English traffic but to American? Even a step further—to the Districts?

"You believe," I queried, "in the synchronization of lights approaching our circles, on Massachusetts Avenue for instance?"

"I do not," he replied. "I advocate what we call 'the flexible progressive'—in other words, a system of so timing traffic signals that traffic moves in squadrons with, let us say, intervening vacuums of which the pedestrian can take advantage in crossing."

"Like the remainder of Europe, you are greatly concerned with the pedestrian angle of the problem then," I observed.

"I believe automobiles with us cause 30 per cent of the accidents; pedestrians 40 per cent; bicycles 20 per cent; miscellaneous 10 per cent."

"Do you have pedestrian penalties, as I have found in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany?" I inquired.

"Only one," he responded. "You see the Anglo-Saxon is jealous of his rights. He believes he should walk where and when his fancy dictates. We are only now slowly educating Englishmen to use the paths cloute's. This is the cross-paths at intersections, marked off with clouts or nails. You will enjoy our one penalty for pedestrians," he added with a suspicion of a twinkle in his eye. "In view of the generally accepted view of English conservatism, you may be surprised to know our one pedestrian penalty is a fine for walking too slowly! Something in the neighborhood of a couple of crowns."

Great Consideration Shown.

"But you do take the most extraordinary care of the pedestrian, it seems to me," I replied, ignoring the twinkle and any invitation to any international discussion. Again I spoke my unstinted admiration of London traffic control. Had I not had a bus stop voluntarily to let me cross Regent Street the day before, and had not that bus in so doing caused six great Picadilly buses to stop likewise for the better part of a minte. I said as much with a word of heartfelt appreciation of the pedestrian isles of safety. I had found them at every corner—great, substantial, cement platforms, cleft in the center for baby carriages. Never once had I felt concerned or constrained to hurry in crossing a street. The thought of Massachusetts Avenue above Sheridan Circle between four and six in the afternoon flashed through my mind. Once I recalled being on the northwest side and walking clear around Sheridan Circle rather than stem the tide that flows from the Circle to the Norwegian Legation at 34th Street, with but one intervening signal light.

"In England," the commissioner replied, "we do not expect the pedestrian to cross two opposing lines of traffic without an isle of safety in the center."

"And, of course, your English bobby supplements your lights," I added. "Would you mind telling me approximately the number of cars in London?"

"Approximately 500,000."

"And the number of traffic officers?" I inquired.

"We shift our men back and forth, but we have the equivalent of 3,000 on traffic duty," he replied promptly.

One Officer to 167 Cars.

I computed hurriedly that meant one officer for every 167 cars. At that moment, as indeed always, I had strong sympathy for Maj. Brown—Maj. Brown with his gallant struggles for an increase in a traffic force which has remained static over a period of 10 years, while automobile registration has increased by leaps and bounds.

There were still three more questions I wished to ask. Would this very busy, though very gracious official mind too much, I wondered. I asked as much. Apparently he wouldn't. "First, then, What is the minimum age for drivers in England?"

"Seventeen years."

"With parents' consent?" I inquired.

"Still with parents' consent, 17. We believe good driving does not depend as much on technical driving ability as on good judgment."

"Then, secondly, is drunkenness a considerable cause of accidents in England?"

"Practically non-existent as a cause of motor accidents."

"Lastly, what is the speed limit?"

"No speed limit. We inculcate the sense of personal responsibility in each driver. Speed limits are provocative."

"But you have compulsory insurance," I continued, forgetting my self-imposed limitation of three questions.

"Yes, for all cars."

"Do your insurance companies take advantage of insurance being compulsory and raise the rates?"

"They do not. Competition operates in this field as elsewhere."

"Incidentally," I said as I arose reluctantly from this, as from all previous traffic conferences, and extended my hand in gratitude, "would you care to have this book on 'The Driver,' which is one of the sportsmanlike driving text books used in a great number of our public schools?" I had one of these text manuals in my hand.

"I would, indeed."

"And Mr. Van Duzer's article on 'Crystal Gazing'—the car of the future?"

"Delighted," he exclaimed warmly.

Mr. Tripp touched his bell and presently my erstwhile British friend who had conducted me thither was escorting me through the same high-paneled corridors.

"By the way," I said, suddenly forgetting all about traffic for a split second, "haven't you a Scotland Yard museum?"

"We have, indeed, ma'am. When Scotland Yard works, it works fast, and we catch 'em bag and baggage. But as to the museum," and he shook his head firmly, "it's nothing for the likes of a lady to see."

Seal to Speak at Luncheon.

Corporation Counsel Elwood Seal was to be the principal speaker at a luncheon meeting of the Central Business Association at 12:15 p.m. today at the Hamilton Hotel.

150 Haunted Castles.

Hearing 150 castles in England are haunted and therefore cannot be sold, a German has offered to "lay" the ghost if one of the owners gives him the run of the castle and pays expenses.

Warns Against Chewing Grass.

Don't chew grass or straw, warns the Transvaal Public Health Department following several deaths from actinomycosis, a disease which gets into the abdomen through chewing grass.

Auto Tax Inclusive.

Motorists in British Malaya now have no fuel taxes, insurance or driver's license to care for since the introduction of the tax of $25 a year on automobiles, which covers everything.